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FREE SOUTHERN AFRICA COMMITTEE

October, 1977

Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 2338
Yellowknife,
Northwest Territories

Dear Friends,

Recently your critics in the Northwest Territories have made a grossly unfair attack upon proposals made to the Government of Canada by the Indian Brotherhood: you have been accused of proposing an "apartheid-like" solution to resolve the contemporary political and economic problems that characterize the Northwest Territories.

As an act of solidarity, the Free Southern Africa Committee(Edmonton) has prepared the following document which attempts to expose not only the fallacy of this accusation but also the vested interests of those who have proposed it. Members of the Territorial Council of the Northwest Territories cannot be allowed to distort the realities of apartheid in Southern Africa in an attempt to discredit the struggle for self-determination by native peoples in northern Canada. Neither can they be allowed to develop a completely false caricature of apartheid that serves to act contrary to the interests of the Black majority and their struggle for liberation in Southern Africa.

The Free Southern Africa Committee has critically examined the content and the implications of this accusation directed against your organization. Our publication of this document should be regarded as an expression of support for the principles embodied in the Dene Declaration and specific proposals that emerge from it.

In solidarity,

The Free Southern Africa Committee
P.O. Box 422
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

One-third of Canada is under direct colonial rule. Yet you seem willing only to talk of igloos, polar bears and snow when you talk about the north. One has to read about South Africa or Rhodesia to get a clear picture of what is really happening in Northern Canada. While your newspapers and television talk about sports fishing up here, we as a people are being destroyed. And it barely gets reported in your TV or newspapers.

Philip Blake, *Dene Nation*, P. 7

The Territorial Council of the N.W.T. and the *Edmonton Journal* have recently constructed an argument that distorts history, affronts the indigenous people of Canada, and makes a mockery of the struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa. The argument attempts to draw a parallel between the South African government's racist policies and the Dene proposal for a political solution to the present conflicts in the Northwest Territories. Both are accused of practicing and promoting apartheid. The fact is that when we examine the issue critically, we find that it is the position of the Government of the N.W.T. and not that of the Dene that actually parallels South Africa's apartheid policy.

In order to make explicit this critical analysis it is necessary to quote from the statement published by the Territorial Council:

These same people (i.e., the Dene and their supporters) think that much of the Territories should be converted into racial states along native lines. Like Mr. Thomas Berger. If you're for what he seems to believe, then you've got to support something that has always been abhorrent to Canadians and violates our history—separating people according to race. Frankly, support Mr. Berger and you have to support South Africa and its policy of apartheid—the separate development for each of its founding races. For it is this very kind of political and economic development that Mr. Berger is talking about for the native peoples of Canada's North. The fanciful name for it is 'positive' racism. And it's well known what the free world thinks of South Africa for it.

***Territorial Council Publication*, P. 6.**

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The most fundamental fallacy of this argument rests with the concept of 'founding races' as used by the Territorial Council. It is a well-known fact of colonialism that the European conquerors, and especially their chroniclers, deny any history to the indigenous peoples and societies contacted in the era of European mercantile expansion. Or, to put it differently, history begins with the coming of the white settler colonies and it is their history that is recorded from this time onwards. From elementary school exams asking who discovered America to university discussions of development and underdevelopment, indigenous aboriginal societies are regarded as having no history, as being static and primitive, and waiting to be destroyed or assimilated—either being a form of genocide.

White settler populations, coming from Europe, found indigenous peoples to be living in dynamic societies that had to be undermined to suit the economic and political imperatives of colonialism. The European settler community was not, by any stretch of historical fantasy, a 'founding race'. This is as true for Southern Africa as it is for Canada, and for that matter the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. The European population was a conquering force.

Centuries later, the dominant class of the European-descended colonizers chooses to reckon history only from the origins of this conquest. The white population becomes, by an absurd logic of illusion and racism, a 'founding race'. The racist Afrikaners in South Africa differ from the northern developers in Canada only in their choice of words, although even here we are beginning to witness a similarity in the contempt exhibited towards the original peoples of both areas.

In sum, there were no 'founding races'; there was an aboriginal, or indigenous population, and a conquering, colonizing population. History did not begin as Buffy Sainte-Marie reminds us, "when Columbus set sail out of Europe that day". Or, in the case of what came to be Canada, it only appears that the Hudson's Bay Company is forever.

Contrary to the a-historical conception explicit in the Council's brief, both South Africa and the Canadian north have a definite history of capitalist penetration that must be critically understood before we can develop a proper understanding of the struggles of indigenous peoples in both areas. To begin with, we need a clear statement of the nature of apartheid in South Africa.

The first point to make about apartheid is that it is a specific form of colonialism. In fact, it may be defined as a racist system imposed by a successful colonialist group upon indigenous peoples and imported 'coolies' and designed to perpetuate the political and cultural supremacy of the first group and the subordination of the latter two, as well as those of mixed parentage. An enforced artificial separation of races and a

monopoly of political rights in the hands of the conquering group and their descendants are the main means of ensuring this distribution of power. The monopoly of power held by the dominant group is buttressed by the active aid of countries eager to share in the exploitation of the apartheid nation's wealth, and for this reason, willing to invest in it, trade with it, and supply it with military equipment and know-how. The apartheid state, having established a monopoly on the nation's land, creates a fiction that indigenous peoples had not settled the best land, and resettles them in the least productive areas which are then designated as 'homelands'. Use of other lands is reserved for the conquering group.

Is there an equivalent to an apartheid system in Canadian history? The historical policy of the Canadian state towards native peoples in Canada has more than a few similarities to the policy of the South African government to the conquered Africans. The system of reserves, like that of Bantustans in South Africa, was imposed upon indigenous peoples by force, threats of force, and trickery. It was racist, denying native peoples normal rights of citizenship including the vote, property ownership, and the right to unrestricted movement. Control over the life of native peoples was, and still remains, in the hands of the Department of Indian Affairs which can veto almost any act of self-determination. Reserves were formed generally on the least fertile land, and the fiction was created that the native peoples had never had possession of other lands in the first place since, in fact, they had no tradition of affixing titles to property and determining rights to its use through the courts. In 1869, for example, the Canadian government purchased the area which later became the three prairie provinces along with most of northern Canada from the Hudson's Bay Company. The Bay's ownership of these territories was based on a title granted by the British Crown in 1670. This title, along with the subsequent purchase, must be considered as theft since it ignored the prior possession of the land by the native peoples. This theft was referred to as 'discovery' and 'settlement'. Further ignoring of the native claims and way of life is evidenced in the slaughter of the buffalo, killed by the millions to suit the needs of the New England tanning industry. Native self-sufficiency was dependent on the buffalo and the land but this self-sufficiency was destroyed in the relentless pursuit of expanded markets required by the North American capitalist class and their states. This historical sequence parallels many of the events in South Africa.

This leads us to the most significant aspect of the apartheid system. South Africa is a country whose economic system is much more like that of other capitalist countries than it is unlike them. Apartheid is best understood not as a set of policies which are separate and different from the rest of world capitalism, but rather as a set of policies which are merely an extension of "business as usual". It is the political and legal *details* of the

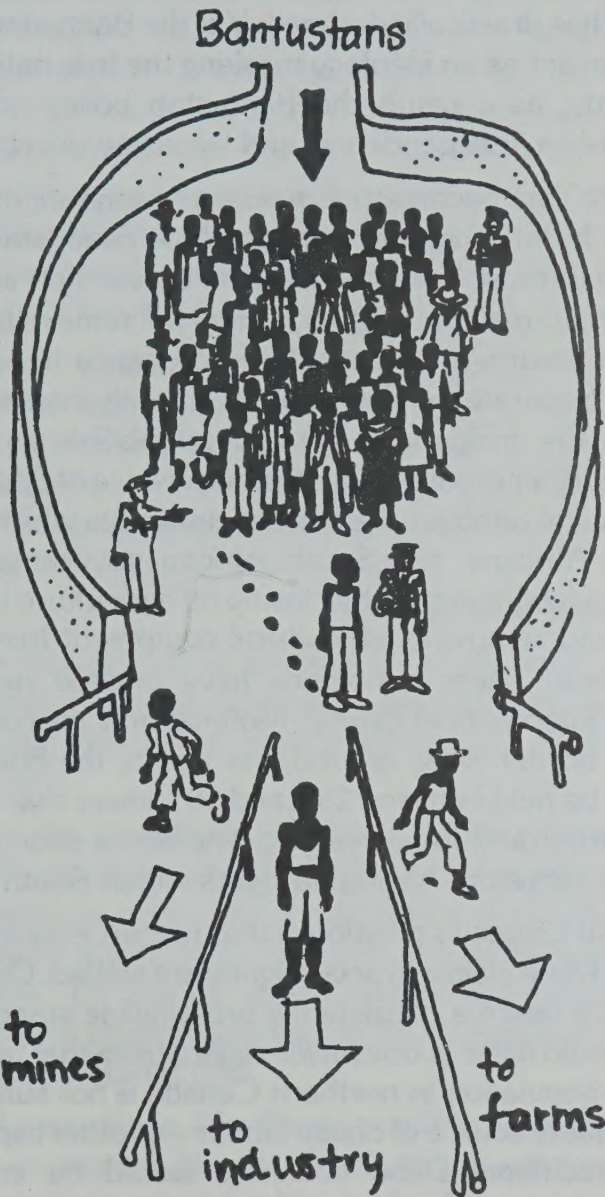
South African system rather than its economic *principles* which distinguishes it from the social system which is familiar to us all.

In both South Africa and Canada, the needs of ordinary people, whether native peoples, workers or farmers are subordinate to the needs of profit. Capitalism, as a system, holds that the capitalist class have the right to appropriate privately what everyone has produced, that they have the right to live on the sweat of others. Such 'rights' are protected by laws, and if need be, by armed force. The nature of these laws varies from country to country depending on specific conditions, but the goal is always the same: exploitation of the majority to make profits for the minority. In South Africa, this goal finds its expression in the apartheid system which, as we will see, serves above all else to further the interests of industrial capitalism. Apartheid was in fact installed, and is presently maintained, by industrial capitalism.

It is extremely ironic, therefore, to find the Territories Council at the same time it is promoting the interests of industrial capitalism, proclaiming that the Dene wish to establish apartheid in the N.W.T. The full absurdity of this argument is now revealed. Since industrial capitalism gains the major profit from apartheid in South Africa, and thus is the most significant supporter of the apartheid regime in that country, why have capitalist interests not flocked to the Dene cause? The answer is that the Territorial Council has stood the truth on its head; it is they, and not the Dene, who propose to establish the equivalent of apartheid in the Canadian north.

We will now examine the parallel roles played by the governments of the Northwest Territories and South Africa in facilitating the dual process of creating profits for the capitalist class and dependency for the indigenous peoples. The Territorial Council equates Dene self-determination with the apartheid concept of separate development. Even the most cursory examination of the facts reveals that this equation is false. In South Africa, separate development is a racist ideology expressed in the goal of establishing nine separate African states in the Bantustan areas. The Bantustan reservations consist of less than 13% of South African territory, yet the African people assigned to them comprise more than 80% of the total population. The Bantustans are divided into 188 geographically separate pieces of territory sharing only one common feature already referred to above: they are the poorest and most unproductive land in South Africa. Since this land area cannot support the African population, the policy of separate development can, in this context, only mean no development at all. This is, in fact, the rationale for the formation of the African states; it assures that the African indigenous population will remain the source of cheap, migratory labour which is essential to the exploitive nature of the South African economy. Thus the racist ideology

of the Bantustan policy hides its true class basis. It is against such class interests, and therefore against the apartheid concept of separate development, that the Dene stand opposed. Moreover, as we have already indicated above, it is the development policies of the Territorial Council, and not Dene self-determination, which if enacted would result in the Bantustanization of the N.W.T.



This can be seen by giving further consideration to the history of the Bantustan policy in South Africa. The Bantustans were created in 1913 as permanent reserves for the African population in order to artificially maintain an impoverished subsistence economy, thus ensuring the

reproduction of a migratory labour force at minimal cost to rapidly expanding resource-based development within South Africa. Since the subsistence economy within the reservation areas could be called upon to partially cover the costs of maintaining and transporting labour, wages were held to a minimal level. The reservations can now maintain no more than 15% of the African population even according to government statistics, in such an impoverished manner, and hence their importance for subsistence has drastically declined. Yet the Bantustans have become increasingly relevant as an ideology masking the true nature of the South African economy; as a result the Bantustan policy now includes the concepts of African 'independence' and 'separate development'.

'Independence' has become the means of disenfranchising indigenous South Africans by making them citizens of African 'states' such as the Transkei to which most have no historical connection and, in fact, may have never seen. In reality, these territories will remain under the control of South Africa assuring that they have no chance to establish a viable local economy. 'Separate development' means only increased poverty and exploitation of the indigenous African population as the Bantustan economies are further eroded under the dominance of South Africa. While international capital removes the mineral resources which are the rightful heritage of all Africans, the South African government assures the continuance of a labour supply by closing off agriculture in fertile areas of the Transkei, and removing agricultural equipment from this so-called independent state. These conditions have created new strategies of exploitation by international capital. Multinational corporations are now flocking to the border areas around, but not in, the Bantustans, where wage rates can be held between 25% and 50% lower than for comparable industries in Durban and Johannesburg. The labour source just across the border remains migratory having no rights within South Africa.

The Territorial Council's position is that resource development should proceed before Dene claims to sovereignty are settled. On this basis, they have for instance taken a consistently pro-pipeline stand. Although this development would differ in one major regard from that in South Africa—the indigenous population in northern Canada is not sufficiently large to provide an adequate source of cheap labour—in other aspects it would be similar. The traditional Dene economy would be impoverished by development activity, leaving no alternative but temporary wage-employment in the areas which outside capitalist interests found profitable to exploit. Native lands would be stripped of valuable non-renewable resources, with the returns that should rightly accrue to the Dene, not in the form of wages but as rents, being converted instead into super-profits for the multinational corporations.

The policy of the Territorial Council and other government interests in northern Canada has been to actively encourage the destruction of the traditional economy while supporting capitalist interests in the exploitation of Dene resources and labour. Since such exploitation is not willingly accepted by the people, it requires as in South Africa maximum control over people's lives. This can be seen, for instance, in the educational system which was created in the 1950's in response to an economic crisis brought about by the collapse of the fur trade and the relations of dependency previously created by the Hudson's Bay Company's penetration into the north. This system was designed to give training for wage-labour employment, and thus to create further dependency of native people on capitalist economic interests. Education was centralized in settlements, and required abandonment of traditional life-styles and subsistence, so there was no guarantee that it would be accepted willingly. Therefore, the people were reminded:

that school is compulsory and that missing school for five consecutive or separate times is liable to punishment. Parents who fail to send their children to school without serious reason and notification to the teacher are liable to be fined and jailed. Moreover family allowance payments may be cancelled upon report made by the proper authorities.

The Catholic Voice, 1957, P. 5.

The northern educational system which attempts to impose a foreign language and life-style on native peoples is one of the most visible means of oppression brought about by a government which serves the interests of industrial capitalism.

In South Africa, the application of apartheid policies to education began seriously in 1953 with the passing of the Bantu Education Act; this placed education for Africans under the total control of the Ministry of Bantu Affairs. The Minister at that time—Verwoerd—warned against the “wrong type of education” for Blacks, which created a frustrated people with “expectations in which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled.” He publicly stated that:

The school must equip (the Bantu pupil) to meet the demands which the economic life of South Africa will impose upon him.... There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.

The repressive education system carries out the aims expressed in Verwoerd's statement, training blacks for economic servitude and acceptance of their position as the exploited class. ‘Separate’ education means many things: schooling is not compulsory for black children and

neither is it free (as it is for Whites); teachers are trained in inferior institutions to transmit the acceptance of the colonized position; classrooms are overcrowded and facilities inadequate. The school does in fact equip the Black child for the realities of economic life in South Africa—**EXPLOITATION.**

Student uprisings in Soweto in 1976 reflected the revolt against this educational system which apprentices them for their own oppression and exploitation as a cheap reservoir of labour. Educational policy in South Africa clearly reflects the interests of industrial capital and its need for an easily exploitable cheap labour force with minimal education. Clearly, the ends of education in northern Canada and in South Africa are one and the same.

Further insight into the relationship between northern Canada and South Africa can be gained by consideration of the corporations which operate in each area. The Bay, which has been the leading exploiter of native peoples in Canada, profits immensely from its extensive fur marketing operations in the apartheid state of Namibia (formerly the German colony of South West Africa) which is illegally controlled by South Africa. Likewise, Falconbridge maintains extensive operations, which it is presently expanding, in South Africa and Namibia, as well as in the N.W.T. Nor is such dual activity limited to Canadian corporations. Oppenheimer, the largest of the South African mining capitalists, is expanding into northern Canada through his control of the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company and other of his Canadian holdings. The Territorial Council directly promotes the interests of these corporations, all of which profit extensively from the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Falconbridge serves as an excellent example of how the desire for profits overrides all other concerns in the capitalist economic system and leads to collusion between multinational corporations and repressive regimes throughout the world. Not content with only investing in South Africa, Falconbridge continues to operate in Rhodesia in violation of United Nations-imposed sanctions, and participates with the South African government in mining ventures in Namibia flagrantly ignoring an International Court of Justice ruling. Falconbridge pays indigenous labour between \$15 and \$40 a month in Namibia. The 1971 after tax profit from a single Falconbridge mine in Namibia was \$3.2 million. In the N.W.T., Falconbridge controls the Giant Yellowknife mine which is notorious for its arsenic pollution in the Yellowknife area. An independent study sponsored by the National Indian Brotherhood and the United Steel Workers of America presents clear evidence of the grave health hazard caused by Falconbridge's operations in the Yellowknife area. Canadian government attempts to cover-up this problem are another

example of governmental and corporate collusion.

There are clearly many similarities between the operation of industrial capital in northern Canada and in the apartheid state of South Africa. Where variation exists, this relates largely to the different strategies required by capital in the face of different population sizes. Because of the small size of the indigenous population in the N.W.T. which makes it unsuitable to fill the need for labour, the capitalist's concern with this area is based exclusively on the availability of non-renewable resources. If the Territorial Council's development policies were to be implemented, these resources would be extracted for as long, and only as long, as this proved profitable for the multinational corporations. When the profit ceased, as it inevitably must, these companies would no longer remain in the north. The bargain offered to the Dene in this, *at the very best*, is as follows:

In return for re-organizing your labour force to suit our needs (i.e., those of industrial capitalism), we will provide you with employment for an indefinite period of time. As a result of our high wages, your people may stop pursuing their traditional bush collection activities and therefore when we leave, as inevitably we must, there is a good possibility that you will be unable to sustain yourself in your native land.

Michael Asch, *The Dene Nation*, P. 60.

In reality, there is not likely to be even this much choice allowed. The policies of the Territorial Council, like those of the South African Government, would lead to the total impoverishment of the indigenous economy in the interests of industrial capitalism.

In terms of a more promising future for northern Canada, the most important parallel, however, is that between the Dene proposals and the aspirations of the legitimate liberation movements in Southern Africa. The struggles of the Dene and the African National Congress (ANC—the organization leading the struggle for Black liberation in South Africa) are best reflected in the documents that they have published on this subject. The ANC *Freedom Charter* begins with the following statement of principles:

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people: that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality: that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities: that only a

democratic state, based on the will of all the people can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief. and therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and whites together—equals, countrymen and brothers—adopt this Freedom Charter.



The Dene right to self-determination is expressed in the following passage from a proposal presented to the government and people of Canada on October 25, 1976:

We the Dene of the N.W.T. insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation ... Colonialism and imperialism is now dead or dying. Recent years have witnessed the birth of new nations or rebirth of old nations out of the ashes of colonialism ... Nowhere in the New World have the Native

peoples won the right to self-determination and the right to recognition by the world as a distinct people and as Nations ... While the Native people of Canada are a minority in their homeland, the Native people of the N.W.T., the Dene and the Inuit, are a majority of the population of the N.W.T. ... What we the Dene are struggling for is the recognition of the Dene Nation by the governments and peoples of the world. And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a county called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people and the recognition of the Dene Nation ... The challenge to the Dene and the world is to find the way for the recognition of the Dene Nation. Our plea to the world is to help us in our struggle to find a place in the world community where we can exercise our right to self-determination as a distinct people and as a nation. What we seek then is independence and self-determination within the country of Canada. This is what we mean when we call for a just land settlement for the Dene Nation.

The Dene Nation Agreement in Principle, presented to the Federal Government on October 25, 1976, adds:

While the Dene have certain Aboriginal Rights not shared by non-Dene, the basic human struggle is shared by all who are working for a world not based on man's exploitation of man. It is therefore contradictory for us not to deal with how the Dene struggle affects the rights of others ... the reality is that there are now many non-Dene in our land, and what we seek is a peaceful relationship with these people, based on recognition of our right and their right to self-determination.



These just claims to self-determination expose the insidiousness of the following statement made by the Territorial Council: "Accept native land claims that would divide the N.W.T. into racial states ... and watch an idea foreign to the principles of Confederation take root in Canada" (*Territorial Council Publication*, P. 25). As in South Africa, racial divisions in Canada are a creation of ruling class interests, and are thus foreign to the Dene struggle. This was expressed quite clearly when the Dene refused to recognize the imposed classifications of the Canadian government—status, non-status, and Metis—and began to act for self-determination as a single people. In this, their struggle parallels that of the South African people. The proposed Dene territory is based not on racial groups, but legitimate claims to political rights and self-determination denied for centuries. As Peter Russell (*The Dene Nation*, P. 164) points out, the Dene claim of nationhood, not only is in accord with the principles of confederation, but also flows from the oldest usage of the term 'nation' as a group of people characterized by a common history and awareness of a unique cultural identity. The scurrilous attack of the Territorial Council is not only groundless, it is best turned around and applied to the Canadian government which, as we have seen, imposed the racial system of reservations on the native peoples of Canada.

In conclusion, it is somewhat ironic to see Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* used by the N.W.T. Council to buttress their absurd and perverse argument that the Indian Brotherhood is proposing "apartheid" for northern Canada. Councillors seemed to have missed the relevant passage in Carroll's classic, a discussion between Alice and Humpty Dumpty about the problem of definition:

"When I use a word," Humpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "It means just what I choose it to mean. Neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "who is to be master. That is all."

The purpose of this document has been to prove that the present master's arbitrary use of the term "apartheid" is fundamentally incorrect; further, the argument demonstrates that the master is attempting to conceal the vested interests represented by the Territorial Council through a flagrant distortion of history, and a complete disregard for the interests of indigenous people in Southern Africa and in Canada.



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